

The Man Behind the Memorial

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Walking through the woods at Round Pond Thursday afternoon with Ed Hardy was like walking back to the pile of ashes where a homeowner's house has just burned to the ground.



It took Ed Hardy, daughter Heather and friend Jason Anthony nearly two months to post the names of 632 of the 900 soldiers killed in Iraq.

Hardy stared at the trees which hours earlier held dozens upon dozens of yellow ribbons containing the names of fallen soldiers that he, his daughter and her friend spent months hanging, as if they were still there, and then, in the blink of an eye, realized that reality held only empty tree trunks instead.

"I'm empty, I'm just empty, I can't believe it's gone," said Hardy as he walked through what used to be the "Indian Path of Reflection" the trio created as a tribute to those who lost their lives in Iraq.

On Thursday, three hours after members of the town's Conservation Department cut down the ribbons and threw them away, Hardy returned to the woods of the trails where his memorial once stood, in disbelief that what he thought was a harmless tribute, the town saw as a public nuisance.

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Lifelong Duxbury resident Ed Hardy came forward last week as the man responsible for hanging yellow ribbons in the woods at Round Pond to honor fallen soldiers and others who've died in Iraq.

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Hours before taking the solemn walk, just after sunrise on Thursday, Hardy had come to the woods at Round Pond to modify his then anonymous memorial, adding another yellow ribbon with the names of Americans Paul Johnson and Nick Berg, held hostage and then beheaded in Iraq.

"I'd just put them up a few hours ago and I just felt so good to do this in their honor," said Hardy. "They only got a few hours [of being honored] and now they are all gone."

Hardy, 65, is a retired schoolteacher and lifelong resident of Duxbury who said that the idea to create the secluded tribute to those who lost their lives in Iraq just "came to him" back in May (see letter in Sounding Off).

He joked that being retired, he has a lot of time to think and often does so in the woods and trails of Round Pond, a place he has fond memories of from his own youth and from that of his daughter, Heather. It was the two of them, along with friend Jason Anthony, who began hanging the ribbons in late May, writing on them the names of fallen soldiers, Iraqi citizens and others who've died since the beginning of war in that country.

"This is something I did that I felt was so good and so positive," said Hardy. "It was for people who'll never get to be here in these woods and their relatives and their pain. This had nothing to do with politics, just humanity, just life and how precious it is."

Hardy loves the wooded maze of the trails and can point you in the direction of a great place to read a book, spot a horned owl and other nooks that only someone who's walked the dirt trails hundreds of times can do. It was this serenity and beauty that he thought would be ideal for the tribute and why he tucked it into the woods rather than along one of the main trailways.

"If I'd put it on the main trails, I'd understand why the

town would be mad, but I put it off into the woods where people aren't jogging or walking with dogs and they can have some quiet and reflect. It was supposed to be out of view."

As for seeking permission from the town, Hardy said that after posting about 100 names, he thought about it for a moment, but never imagined anyone would find the tribute degrading or offensive.

Hardy said he never intended for media coverage of his endeavor because "it's not about me, it's about [those who died]" nor did he expect such a harsh reaction from town officials like Conservation Agent Joe Grady. Last week, Grady called the memorial an inappropriate use of town land and something at least one walker found "unnerving."

who did get it said Hardy, including Bill Morse of Kingston who Hardy read about in last week's *Clipper*, who walked his dog through the tribute trail at least twice a week and was moved by its presence.

"The fact that one person discovered this means the world to me," he said. "He was moved and the point was just to feel something, no matter what it was you felt."

While the memorial went anonymous for months, Hardy was comforted by the fact the town might let it stay up through the summer. He then planned to reveal his identity and purpose for creating the memorial in October after people had time to experience it themselves.

Instead, the memorial is

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—Ed Hardy

"[Grady] could not see what we were doing here," said Hardy. "His rules and regulations clouded what he could've seen. He missed out. This is not his land, but mine, yours and the town's"

Hardy did express his feelings about the memorial's removal face-to-face with Town Manager Rocco Longo on Friday. Duxbury police were called to escort Hardy out of Longo's office after he called the town manager a liar for saying he did not see the names of soldiers written on the ribbons.

There are some, however,

now gone and the yellow ribbons that held 632 names of the 900 soldiers who died in Iraq have been cut down and now sit in a landfill somewhere in Massachusetts.

Hardy had hoped for a better ending to the story.

"I wanted people to see it first and feel something and then I'd come forward," he said. "I thought we'd get to 900 names and a nice way to end it would be to have the American Legion come out and have someone play 'Taps' or have the Boy Scouts out to take them down one at a time. That would've been nice."